DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 975 PS 022 829

AUTHOR Matthews, Stephen
TITLE Growing Readers: What To Look for in Children's Books. AECA Resource Book Series, No. 1, March, 1993.
INSTITUTION Australian Early Childhood Association, Inc., Watson.
REPORT NO ISBN-1-86323-038-6; ISSN-0156-0999
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 19p.
AVAILABLE FROM Australian Early Childhood Association, P.O. Box 105, Watson, Australian Capital Territory 2602, Australia ($25 Australian including postage; 4 issues per year).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Annotated Bibliographies; Childrens Literature; Early Childhood Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Foreign Countries; Picture Books; Reading Aloud to Others; Reading Materials; *Reading Material Selection; *Selection Tools
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; Shared Book Experience; Shared Reading

ABSTRACT

This resource book is intended to help parents identify good books for their children by offering a list of the best contemporary Australian books for children and by explaining ways to recognize what qualities to look for in new and unfamiliar books. The first section of the book answers some common questions about why books and reading aloud are important to children's development. The second section contains an annotated list of over 70 recommended children's books in the following categories: (1) board books; (2) alphabets and counting books; (3) aboriginal stories; (4) laughter; (5) everyday life; (6) flights of the imagination; (7) animals; (8) back in time; (9) longer picture books; (10) poetry and anthologies; and (11) short novels. The third section discusses five criteria for choosing children's books. Those criteria are suitability, literary and artistic merit, balance between text and illustrations, production quality, and lasting appeal. The final section of the book offers an annotated list of reference books that contain more recommended books and discussion of how to use them with children. (TJQ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

AECA Resource Book Series

No.1 March, 1993

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Growing Readers

What to look for in children's books

ED 375 975

PS 022829

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Sonya Davidson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Stephen Matthews

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The AECA Resource Book Series (formerly the Australian Early Childhood Resource Booklets) is published four times each year, by the Resource Book Committee of the Australian Early Childhood Association Inc., Knox Street, Watson, ACT 2602.

Committee Members:

Marilyn Fleer (Editor)
Anne Fletcher
Jean Gifford
Kath Larsson
Therezia Mihajlovic
Jane Smyth
Dawn Sword
Veronica Wraith (Editorial Assistant)

The AECA Resource Book Series aims to provide practical support to workers in all early childhood settings. The books bring together the best information available on wide ranging topics and are an ideal resource for practitioners and students. Booklets produced in previous years have now become standard texts in many early childhood courses.

Subscriptions to: Australian Early Childhood Association Inc.
PO Box 105
Watson, ACT 2602
Yearly (4 issues) $25.00 including postage (1993)

About the author: Stephen Matthews has had 25 years experience of choosing and recommending books for children. He was a class teacher and then a principal in two English primary schools. Since coming to Australia in 1979 he has been a teacher, an educational sales representative, a school resource-sharing project officer, a school librarian and, most recently, a bookseller. He currently manages one of Australia's best-known and biggest academic and general bookshops, the Co-op Bookshop on the Australian National University campus. Stephen is a regular reviewer of children's books for *The Australian Book Review* and is the compiler of the book *Children's Books of the Century*, an annotated record of the winners of the major children's literary awards in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Photographs: Cover - Courtesy Barbara Stout; Page 3 and 15 - Rhonda Milner.

Illustrations: Margaret Sikorski
Book covers throughout the text were supplied by Stephen Matthews courtesy of the publishers.

© Copyright 1993. All rights reserved by the Australian Early Childhood Association Inc. Material herein must not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Association. Registered for posting as a publication — Category B. No. NBG 2618.

ISSN 0 156 0999
ISBN 1 86323 038 6

Typeset by Diplomat Typesetting Services—Canberra
Printed by Goanna Print—Canberra

Growing Readers

What to look for in children's books

Stephen Matthews

CONTENTS

Why worry about children's books? 2

About this book 4

Board books 4

Alphabets and counting books 5

Aboriginal stories 6

Laughter 6

Everyday life 7

Flights of the imagination 9

Animals 10

Back in time 11

Longer picture books 12

Poetry and anthologies 13

Short novels 14

What to look for when choosing books for young children 14

Further help 16

References 16

WHY WORRY ABOUT CHILDREN'S BOOKS?

I'm often asked why I'm so concerned that children should not only be taught to read but also learn that reading is enjoyable. For help in answering those and other questions I've turned to several well-known writers.

Why are books important?

The answer Butler (1988:xiii) gives is:

> Because by their very nature they are rooted in language, and because language is essential to human communication, and communication is the life blood of relationships, books **matter**.

Why is reading aloud important?

It is easy to question the value of reading aloud, as Trelease (1986:1) suggests:

> In an era when electronic information is at one's fingertips, when satellites bring the world's wonders and excitement into our living room, why read aloud to children?

Trelease goes on to answer this question:

> . . . to reassure, to entertain, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity and to inspire—and to do it all personally, not impersonally with a machine . . . A secondary reason . . . is the established fact that regular reading aloud strengthens children's reading, writing and speaking skills—and thus the entire civilising process.

What effects do books have on children's experience?

Through books, children's minds can be opened to people, places and times they can visit in no equally effective way:

> . . . while books can never be a substitute for real-life experience, they can add immeasurably to life's richness—they can accelerate language development and provide a wide range of sensory experiences. Inland children can know the sound of the sea and the exhilaration of the surf, city dwellers can see 'the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended, and at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars'. Books too can provide vicarious emotional experiences that help make the reader more perceptive, sensitive and caring.
>
> (Saxby & Smith, 1991:1-2)

Why are books better than television?

Comparing readers to television viewers, Trelease (1986:1) says:

> The reader can stop and ponder the character's next move, the feathers on his hat, or the meaning of a sentence. Having done so, he can resume where he left off, without having missed part of the story.

Landsberg (1988 17) puts it another way

> Books are portable packages of life and meaning, unimaginably diverse. They can be hugged, chewed, carried to bed or to a secret hideout in a tree, read and re-read, and the reader is always in control—skipping, going back, absorbing deeply or skimming forward. The creative power of reading is as far from the passive watching of TV as exploring a wilderness is from browsing through the supermarket. And because the reader virtually creates in her mind the book in her hands, books offer uniquely appropriate rewards to every age group

How do books prepare children for school?

Children who have been well acquainted with books before starting school are off to a flying start

> The child who comes to school already having experienced the deep satisfaction of listening to stories is, as any teacher can testify, a privileged student, far ahead of the others in literacy skills, attention span, responsiveness to ideas and capacity for abstraction
>
> (Landsberg, 1988 17)

The association of loving physical contact with stories told and books read aloud will make reading an enjoyable experience for young children.

Where do we start?

If you want your child to become a reader, the first lesson—taught by your choice of books—must be that books are enjoyable

> To make your child into a reader forget the flashcards and the alphabet. Concentrate on song, finger play, and the association of loving physical contact with stories told and books read aloud . . . Make sure yours is a home in which books are freely available

and enjoyed by adults too, not just prescribed as medicine for children. I would have stacks of picture books around the house, and would read aloud whenever a moment could be seized from the daily routine—not just at bedtime. And I would never teach letters or turn reading into a lesson unless the child herself demanded information.

(Landsberg, 1988:24-25)

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is designed to help you identify the right books for your children in two ways: firstly by offering a list of the very best contemporary Australian books for children, secondly by pointing out ways in which you can recognise for yourself what qualities to look for in new and unfamiliar books.

Nearly all the books listed should be available, in inexpensive paperback editions, from good bookshops. Most of the books cost under $10 with a few ranging between $15 and $20. The reference books listed in the further help section range between $15 and $30. Your local library should be able to help with all the books listed, including the more expensive ones and even the very few which may no longer be available in bookshops.

Board books are intended for children who are too young to handle less sturdy books without damaging them but who can recognise objects and incidents, so look for the clear illustrations and simple concepts found in this selection.

THE AUSTRALIAN ANIMAL BOOK. Lothian
THE AUSTRALIAN BEACH BOOK. Lothian
THE AUSTRALIAN FARM BOOK. Lothian
THE AUSTRALIAN HOME BOOK. Lothian

These strong books offer clear colour photographs of animals and objects which the youngest of children will enjoy recognising and naming. The books demonstrate exactly what good board books should offer, combining, as they do, durability of manufacture with simplicity of content.

Alison Lester,
BIBS AND BOOTS. Viking
BUMPING AND BOUNCING. Viking
CRASHING AND SPLASHING. Viking
HAPPY AND SAD. Viking

All four of these sturdy books combine colourful, detailed (but not over-complicated) pictures, and interesting borders, with short sentences to describe everyday events in a way that the very youngest children will enjoy. These are excellent introductions to the world of books.

Letters and numbers are part of every child's earliest learning. These books introduce them with colour, humour and vitality, making learning an irresistible pleasure.

Graeme Base. **ANIMALIA**. Puffin

Animalia is an alphabet book breathtaking in concept and execution. Each illustration, sometimes over a double page, contains an amazing number of objects beginning with the respective letter. The book offers temptations for eyes and mind irresistible to any child who understands what letters are and to any adult who loves wordplay—how many objects can **you** find for each letter?

John Brennan. **A IS FOR AUSTRALIA**. Houghton Mifflin

Vivid, sharply-focused photographs depict particularly aptly chosen Australian objects for every letter of the alphabet. The choice for X is especially ingenious. **A Is For Australia** is an ideal first alphabet book.

Rod Trinca and Kerry Argent. **ONE WOOLLY WOMBAT**. Omnibus

From one to fourteen, this truly Australian counting book shows favourite animals engaged in exuberantly nonsensical activities. As well as the appropriate number of animals to count on the right hand page of each opening, there is the same number on the opposite page depicted by an item taken from the main illustration.

Gwenda Turner. **AUSTRALIAN ABC**. Puffin

Warmly realistic pictures, full of incident and movement, illustrate objects for each letter of the alphabet. **Australian ABC** is one of the best of its kind.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Every child needs to know how ancient our country is. These stories are a unique reminder of a time when every natural phenomenon was a cause of wonder and gave rise to a mythic explanation.

Dick Roughsey.
THE GIANT DEVIL DINGO, Angus & Robertson
THE RAINBOW SERPENT, Angus & Robertson

Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey.
THE FLYING FOX WARRIORS, Angus & Robertson
NGALCULLI THE RED KANGAROO, Angus & Robertson
THE QUINKINS, Angus & Robertson

Percy Trezise.
BANANA BIRD AND THE SNAKE MAN, Angus & Robertson
GIDJA, Angus & Robertson
LASCA AND HER PUPS, Angus & Robertson
THE MAGIC FIRESTICKS, Angus & Robertson
THE OWL PEOPLE, Angus & Robertson
TURRAMULLI THE GIANT QUINKIN, Angus & Robertson

All the titles in this series retell traditional Aboriginal stories. The stories are accompanied by starkly colourful paintings which don't shy away from the sometimes primevally gruesome nature of the events. They provide an essential introduction to Aboriginal Dreamtime myths.

Pat Torres, **JALYGURR : AUSSIE ANIMAL RHYMES**, Magabala

Despite its somewhat austere illustrations, this collection of Aboriginal rhymes, from Kimberley Aboriginal folk stories, is a rare and valuable introduction to Australia's indigenous culture. The book has parallel English and Yawuru text, a glossary and notes on pronunciation.

Pat Torres and Magdalene Williams, **THE STORY OF CROW**, Magabala

This colourfully illustrated traditional Aboriginal story from Western Australia has parallel English and Nyul Nyul text plus a glossary and notes on pronunciation. It tells in simple verse why crows, once white-feathered and sweet-voiced, now have black plumage and croaking cries.

Everyone enjoys laughing. These books allow you to share comic characters and incidents with your children.

Stephen Axelsen, **THE OATH OF BAD BROWN BILL**, Puffin

This rollicking tall tale is about a bush-ranger who accepts a challenge to his bravery by taking an oath that he will rob the ghostly dead. Told in ornate verse and extravagantly illustrated, **The Oath Of Bad Brown Bill** balances some scary moments with its absurd humour. Fearless children will love it, but avoid it if you're not sure whether your children can cope with the gruesome incidents and pictures.

These books show the magic and wonder to be found in even the most simple everyday occurrences.

Graeme Base, **MY GRANDMA LIVED IN GOOLIGULCH**, Puffin

My Grandma Lived in Gooligulch is a tall tale about an exceptionally adventurous grandma, suitably told in extravagant language and enhanced by lively illustrations giving prominent place to our native fauna, which appear to leap out of the page in the alternate colour double openings.

Rod Clement, **COUNTING ON FRANK**, Angus & Robertson

Counting on Frank is a marvellously quirky story about a boy so obsessed with numerical facts that he can't help working out bizarre sums (like how many humpback whales would fit into his house) and imagining the results—which are depicted with comically literal accuracy in the pictures.

Max Dann, **BERNICE KNOWS BEST**, illustrated by Ann James, Oxford University Press

Hugh is probably the world's clumsiest boy, but with the well-intentioned (if not necessarily fully thought-out) help of the resourceful Bernice, he enters and more or less unwittingly wins, against all odds, a downhill bicycle race. This marvellously zestful comic romp ends in Hugh being cured of his clumsiness—well, almost! This longish story would be best appreciated by over-sixes.

Libby Hathorn, **ALL ABOUT ANNA AND HARRIET AND CHRISTOPHER AND ME**, Mammoth Australia

Anna causes chaos whenever she visits her cousins and in six chapters this book hilariously describes exactly how her incorrigible exuberance leads to disaster (and helpless dismay to every adult in sight!). Children too young to read the stories themselves will enjoy hearing them read aloud.

Mem Fox, **SHOES FROM GRANDPA**, illustrated by Patricia Mullins, Ashton Scholastic

In cumulative fashion, the rhythmic text tells how Grandpa gives Jessie new shoes and the rest of the family chip in with additional items of clothing until Jessie explains that all she really wants is a pair of jeans. Patricia Mullins' painstaking tissue paper collages perfectly complement the story.

Mem Fox, **SOPHIE**, illustrated by Craig Smith, Drakeford/Watts

In less than 90 impeccably chosen words, illuminated by Craig Smith's warmly executed pictures, this life-affirming book tells how Sophie grows up and her grandfather grows old. He dies but Sophie has married and gives birth to a daughter. **Sophie** is a gem of a book, showing with great sensitivity to even very young children how death and life are poignantly entwined.

Mem Fox, **WILFRID GORDON McDONALD PARTRIDGE**, illustrated by Julie Vivas, Omnibus

Wilfrid lives next door to an old people's home, and though he has befriended many of the old folk, his particular favourite is Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt

Cooper because like him she has four names. When his parents tell him she's lost her memory, Wilfrid asks everyone what a memory is and assembles a variety of objects intended to restore Miss Nancy's. This heart-warming story effectively bridges the gap between youth and old age.

Bob Graham, **CRUSHER IS COMING!**, Collins

Worried by the imminent visit of his tough friend Crusher, Peter tries to eradicate every hint of gentleness in his behaviour and possessions. Crusher, however, turns out to be more interested in playing with Peter's baby sister. **Crusher Is Coming** takes a subtle dig at role expectations. Note that Peter's father is absent, without reference or explanation.

Alison Lester,
CLIVE EATS ALLIGATORS, Oxford University Press
ROSIE SIPS SPIDERS, Oxford University Press
TESSA SNAPS SNAKES, Oxford University Press

Seven children are shown engaged in their favourite activities, which range from eating to going to bed. Though their choices are mostly unexceptional and everyday, each child has one somewhat eccentric preference. These deceptively simple but marvellous celebrations of diversity and individuality are supported by rhythmic and intuitively repetitive text and detailed illustrations.

Morag Loh, **THE KINDER HAT**, illustrated by Donna Rawlins, Ashton Scholastic

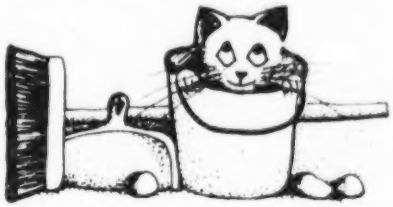
At kindergarten Jessie makes a hat for her mum and insists she wear it on the way home. Despite her embarrassment at the amused reactions of everyone she passes, mum does so. Later on, dad tries it on too, but decides it suits mum much better! Young children will enjoy the story on its surface level, but parents will recognise the understated humour in text and illustrations. Note the unobtrusive multicultural mixture of faces.

Morag Loh, **TUCKING MUMMY IN**, illustrated by Donna Rawlins, Ashton Scholastic

When Sue and Jenny's mum is tired out at the end of the day and lies down on Jenny's bed, Sue tells her a story and she falls asleep. After gently waking her, the children lead her to her own bed and tuck her in. **Tucking Mummy in** is a simple, loving story, warmly illustrated. Note the importance given to bedtime stories!

Margaret Wild and Julie Vivas, **THE VERY BEST OF FRIENDS**, Margaret Hamilton

William the cat lives on James and Jessie's farm. James loves him, Jessie doesn't. When James dies, Jessie shuts William out of the house, but when she sees how neglected he has become she encourages him back and begins to love him. Vivas' illustrations give life and warmth to this simple story.



Flights of the Imagination

Free your children's imagination with these fanciful stories.

Nan Bodsworth, **HELLO KANGAROO!**, Nelson

Dorothy visits the zoo with her fastidious aunt, who constantly discourages Dorothy from touching any of the animals lest she get dirty. Dorothy meekly obeys but sets her imagination to work on what would happen if she **were** allowed to get close to the animals. Finally, after a mishap to her aunt, Dorothy gets to help feed the animals for real. **Hello Kangaroo!** is an enchanting book with superbly realistic illustrations.

Anna Fienberg, **THE MAGNIFICENT NOSE AND OTHER MARVELS**, illustrated by Kim Gamble, Allen & Unwin

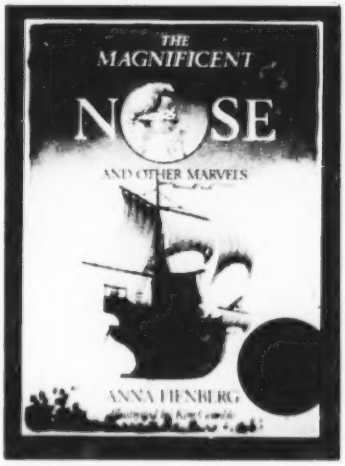
Five exceptionally resourceful children, aided by Aristan the spider, each have a marvellous adventure before meeting up not only with each other but also with the storyteller! Delightfully whimsical, these finely wrought flights of fancy should succeed in transporting any young readers or listeners. Kim Gamble's illustrations capture the fanciful tone of the stories, which are most likely to be enjoyed by over-sixes.

Libby Hathorn, **THE EXTRAORDINARY MAGICS OF EMMA McDADE**, illustrated by Maya, Oxford University Press

Emma is as strong as Samson, can whistle loudly enough to bring birds flocking and can make it rain. She uses all these 'magics' to foil some robbers, and then discovers yet another 'magic'. This jaunty piece of whimsy will encourage readers on the threshold of independence.

Nan Hunt, **WHISTLE UP THE CHIMNEY**, illustrated by Craig Smith, Collins

When quiet Mrs Millie Mack puts some old railway wood on her fire, she is excited to find that all kinds of trains begin to clatter and whoosh right down her chimney and on through her house! **Whistle Up the Chimney** is a splendidly vigorous fantasy told in suitably rhythmic, onomatopoeic prose and supported by wonderfully detailed illustrations and appropriate page decorations.



Robin Klein, **THING**, illustrated by Alison Lester, Oxford University Press

Emily, who lives with her mother in the flat above their tetchy landlady, finds a rock from which hatches a dinosaur—Thing. Thing wins over the hostile landlady only after foiling a burglary. **Thing** is a gentle story told with appealingly deadpan humour and enhanced by Alison Lester's buoyant illustrations and inventive decorations. Note the (unexplained) absence of Emily's father.

Peter Pavey, **BATTLES IN THE BATH**, Puffin

Bored in her bath, a girl lets her imagination run riot, first with her toys and then with her whole bathroom surroundings, to the extent that, in her mind, the room slowly changes into the outdoors and she has to battle with the creatures her toys have been transformed into. The rhyming text and wonderfully bizarre pictures show the clear influence of Maurice Sendak's **Where the Wild Things Are**

These books will familiarise children with wild and domesticated animals in both realistic and anthropomorphic settings.

Mem Fox, **HATTIE AND THE FOX**, illustrated by Patricia Mullins, Ashton Scholastic

Hattie the chook spots a fox and tries to warn the other farm animals, who take no notice until the fox pounces. The rhythmic, repetitive text and clever tissue paper collage illustrations bring out all the action and chaotic fun of this humorous story.

Mem Fox, **KOALA LOU**, illustrated by Pamela Lofts, Puffin

Koala Lou is sad because her mother's single-minded devotion to her has been diluted by the arrival of siblings. She decides to enter the bush olympics so that, by winning, she will regain her mother's attention. She loses her event but is assured by her mother that nevertheless she **is** loved and always **will** be. **Koala Lou** is a gentle and humorous story with a comforting message for children feeling displaced by younger siblings.

Mem Fox, **POSSUM MAGIC**, illustrated by Julie Vivas, Omnibus

Hush the possum is made invisible by her grandma and enjoys her mischievous exploits until she wants to be visible again and finds that grandma has lost the formula. They travel across Australia trying all sorts of foods until a vegemite sandwich, pavlova and lamington do the trick. **Possum Magic** is a timeless piece of whimsy, immeasurably enriched by Julie Vivas' exuberantly portrayed animals.

Kiersten Jensen, **POSSUM IN THE HOUSE**, illustrated by Tony Oliver, Childerset

A possum wreaks havoc as it races through every room in the house, finally falling asleep in one of the bedrooms. The energetic rhyming story is perfectly matched by zestful illustrations which elaborate every chaotic event.

Sheena Knowles, **EDWARD THE EMU**, illustrated by Rod Clement, Angus & Robertson

Edward is bored with his life in the zoo and tries to emulate a succession of animals whose life he envies, until he hears a visitor declare that the emu is the best thing in the zoo. The humour of this story of self-acceptance is wonderfully brought out in the pictures, which are drawn from an almost startlingly close-up viewpoint.

Andrew and Janet McLean, **HECTOR AND MAGGIE**, Allen & Unwin

Hector the rooster tries to show Maggie the new sheep dog that he's boss of the

farmyard, but Maggie's stubborn and energetic persistence succeeds in teaching him some humility. **Hector and Maggie** is a simple story given life by illustrations full of movement.

Sue Machin, **I WENT WALKING**, illustrated by Julie Vivas, Omnibus

Simple text and charming illustrations show a child walking through a farmyard and encountering a variety of animals. Very young children will enjoy repeating the rhythmic text and spotting the clues to the identity of the animal to be uncovered on the next page. This is a fine example of that rarity—the book which can inspire a growing love of the printed word in the youngest of children.

Patricia Mullins, **DINOSAUR ENCORE**, Margaret Hamilton

With wonderfully detailed and vivid collages, mainly using tissue paper, Patricia Mullins illustrates a series of questions about different dinosaurs. The rich, rhythmic text, with all those difficult names children love trying to get their tongues around, is almost as inviting as the glowing pictures, some of which fold out.

Historical events and settings are vividly brought to life in these books, giving children an insight into life at different times and in different circumstances.

Libby Hathorn, **THE TRAM TO BONDI BEACH**, illustrated by Julie Vivas, Angus & Robertson

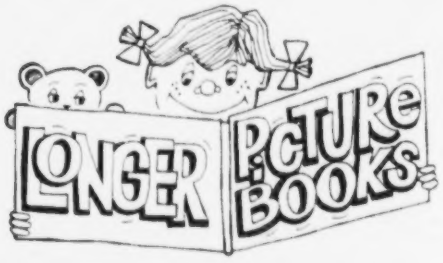
Bygone Sydney, lovingly evoked in Julie Vivas' watercolours, is the setting for this story of Keiran who wants to be a newspaper boy just like Saxon, who sells newspapers to tram commuters. On his ninth birthday, Keiran gets his wish but, after a fall from a tram, he has to accept a safer job, albeit still selling papers, while nurturing a dream of one day becoming a tram driver.

Christobel Mattingley, **THE ANGEL WITH A MOUTH-ORGAN**, illustrated by Astra Lacis, Hodder & Stoughton

Arguably the best book about war and refugees ever written for young children, this is the poignant story of a family separated from the father by war. Forced to keep trudging away from slaughter and destruction, the mother and her two daughters suffer many hardships before being reunited with the father. Be warned that, with its Christmas focus, its heart-rendingly simple prose and its unflinchingly realistic illustrations, this book is capable of moving adults perhaps even more than children. Be cautious about introducing **The Angel With a Mouth-Organ** to children under eight.

Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins, **MY PLACE**, Collins Dove

My Place is an ingeniously contrived book which tells the story of one place in Sydney and the people who have lived there, at ten year intervals going back in time from 1988 to 1788. Through cleverly assembled pictures and maps, and first person text, readers can trace strands back and forth through the last 200 years of our history. This masterpiece of conception and execution has a poignant ending which forces readers to reflect on the present day and to retrace their steps back through the book. Over-sixes will best appreciate it.



As children start to become independent readers, they need longer stories but undaunting ones. These books are ideal for reading aloud but will not deter emerging readers.

Robin Klein, **BORIS AND BORSCH**, illustrated by Cathy Wilcox, Allen & Unwin

Two boys (one angelic, one much tougher) are both given teddy bears (one neat and perfect, the other somewhat scruffier). At first mismatched, owners and bears eventually sort each other out. **Boris and Borsch** is a simple story told with humour and gusto which are augmented in the exuberant illustrations.

Christobel Mattingley, **THE BIG SWIM**, illustrated by Frances Luke, Ashton Scholastic

Younger than his brother and their friends and unable to swim as far, Peter feels left out of all that used to make their Christmas seaside holiday enjoyable. Then, by sheer force of will, he manages the big swim the others do and is embraced again by the group. **The Big Swim** is a gentle, reassuring story about growing up and overcoming one of life's real, albeit small, adversities. Note the carefully observed regard for the natural environment.

Christobel Mattingley, **BRAVE WITH BEN**, illustrated by Elizabeth Honey, Puffin

On holiday at his grandmother's, Peter tentatively explores her enormous, overgrown garden. He finally overcomes his apprehensiveness with the help of Ben, the neighbour's dog. A triumphantly simple story about overcoming fear of the unknown, **Brave With Ben** is given added effectiveness by the glowing, realistic black and white pictures.

Christobel Mattingley, **LIZARD LOG**, illustrated by Walter Stackpool, Hodder & Stoughton

On a camping holiday with his mother and baby sibling, Tony enjoys observing and feeding a variety of lizards which make themselves at home in their tent. He stumbles upon some lizard poachers and releases all the ones they've caught. This is a warm story with an unpreachy conservationist message and realistic illustrations and endpapers. Note the (unremarked) absence of Tony's father.

Christobel Mattingley, **RUMMAGE**, illustrated by Patricia Mullins, Angus & Robertson

Septimus Portwine's stall in a London street market isn't presentable enough for his snobbish fellow stall-holders. Though he makes an attempt to run his stall in the way they'd like, he eventually realises that he and his customers prefer the old disorderly style. A good-humoured story of a mild-mannered man's gently

determined assertion of his individuality. **Rummage** is enhanced by Patricia Mullins' colourful illustrations.

Colin Thiele. **FARMER SCHULZ'S DUCKS**. Illustrated by Mary Milton. Walter McVitty

Farmer Schulz's Ducks is a good-humoured story about a farmer whose ducks are threatened by increasing traffic along the road which they've been accustomed to waddling across whenever they like. After several mishaps the whole family finally devise a safe way for the ducks to cross the road. Mary Milton's illustrations are endearingly lifelike.

Children love the rhythm and colour of verse. This selection of books will introduce them to favourite poets and classic poems.

C.J. Dennis. **HIST!**. Illustrated by P.J. Gouldthorpe. Walter McVitty

Linocut pictures, full of light and shadow and bordered by spooky silhouettes, give vivid new life to the classic poem describing how three children out too late encounter all sorts of frightening places and creatures on their way home in the dark. The illustrations interpret the poem cleverly, drawing out possibilities not made explicit in the text.

Jill Heylen and Celia Jellett. **SOMEONE IS FLYING BALLOONS**. Illustrated by Kerry Argent. Omnibus

With over 90 Australian poems, this anthology is divided into six broadly thematic sections. The collection is perhaps let down by the oddly static, formal nature of some of the illustrations. Generally, however, this is a fine sampler of Australian verse, both traditional and contemporary, likely to prompt further exploration of our poetic heritage.

A.B. Paterson.
WALTZING MATILDA. Angus & Robertson
THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER. Angus & Robertson
MULGA BILL'S BICYCLE. Angus & Robertson

Three favourite Banjo Paterson poems are brought to life by widely divergent styles of illustration. All three books offer excellent introductions to the magic and rhythm of verse in general, and Paterson's in particular.

Rosalind Price and Walter McVitty. **THE PUFFIN BEDTIME STORY BOOK**. Illustrated by Ron Brooks. Puffin

This sumptuous collection of traditional tales, well-loved poems and contemporary stories is ideal for dipping into and sharing at—of course—bedtime. It is gently illustrated by one of Australia's best illustrators.

Cathy Wilcox. **IN THE OLD GUM TREE**. Allen & Unwin

In the Old Gum Tree is a lively combination of traditional nursery rhymes with more recent Australian verse, accompanied by appropriately humorous and energetic illustrations. This is an excellent introduction to poetry for the very young.

Newly independent readers will find these short novels ideal stepping stones on the way to becoming fully fluent.

Christobel Mattingley, **WINDMILL AT MAGPIE CREEK**, Hodder & Stoughton

Tim, a farmer's son, is afraid of climbing the farm's windmill because of the magpies. When his father has an accident and the windmill needs repair, Tim is the only one who can fix it, so he is forced to overcome his fear. **Windmill At Magpie Creek** is a moving and effective story of growing up and confronting challenges by a writer who knows better than most how learning to master life's small challenges can fortify children for more serious tribulations later on.

Jenny Pausacker, **FAST FORWARD**, Angus & Robertson

Kieran likes to live his life at a faster pace than the rest of the family. Then his grandmother gives him a gadget which allows him to fast forward everything he does, in the way a remote controller can fast forward a video. When the novelty fades, and the trouble starts, Kieran wishes he had never set eyes on it. This energetic fantasy should appeal to any fidgety child needing encouragement to read independently.

Emily Rodda,
SOMETHING SPECIAL, Puffin
PIGS MIGHT FLY, Puffin
FINDERS KEEPERS, Omnibus

These gentle award-winning fantasies (involving ghosts, odd happenings and time shifts) all have the capacity to encourage independence in reading. All three books are undemanding in plot, style and characterisation and so not likely to intimidate, yet they are long enough to exercise and entice newly emerging readers.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING BOOKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

The best books for children are those which most comprehensively meet the following criteria. These criteria are not intended to be exhaustive, but are those I have found to be most useful.

Suitability

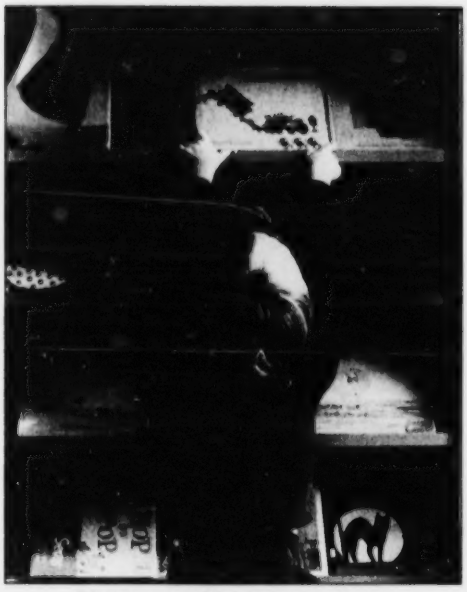
You will want to be sure that the vocabulary in thebook you are considering is appropriate for the child you have in mind. The vocabulary must be intelligible but not unduly limited—new and challenging words should be there, but not in daunting numbers. You will consider also whether the story is intelligible at a conceptual level: that is to say, your child should be able to understand the events, and the purpose, of the story. You will look at the illustrations to see that they can be interpreted without confusion. Finally with regard to suitability, you will question the book's values: you will want to be sure that the book avoids racist, sexist and other stereotypes.

Literary and artistic merit

Even in the simplest picture books, these are important aspects to take into account. You will want to choose books with language rich enough to open and extend your child's imagination. You will expect the illustrations to be visually engaging, they will draw out unstated aspects of the story and elaborate on what is explicit in the text.

Balance between text and illustrations

It is important, especially in picture books of course, for the text and illustrations on each opening to be addressing the same part of the story. You will avoid books where the demands of the text are greater than the interest of the illustrations, and vice versa.



Children will return to their favourite books again and again.

Production quality

You will want to satisfy yourself that the book is durably bound, and printed on good paper. You will expect the illustrations to be well reproduced and the text to be clearly printed in a typeface of an appropriate size, especially when you are looking for a book for children to read on their own.

Lasting appeal

Young children will want to return to their favourite books almost ad infinitum, so you will want to ensure that the books you choose can be read and looked at over and over again without boring your child or you!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FURTHER HELP

For more recommended books and for more detailed discussion of how and why to share them with your children, these books will be especially useful. They also cover the best British and American books.

Belle Alderman, **BEST BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**, Ashton Scholastic

This helpful, colourfully illustrated guide to books for children from their earliest years to the beginning of their teens is thematically grouped. The recommendations include British and American books as well as a generous selection from Australia.

Dorothy Butler, **BABIES NEED BOOKS**, Penguin

This inspirational book is a must for all parents. Not only does it explain with great lucidity and conviction why babies need books, it also includes annotated lists of recommended books (mostly British and American) for children of every age up to six.

Dorothy Butler, **FIVE TO EIGHT**, Bodley Head

Dorothy Butler continues her energetic advocacy of good books for the young, concentrating here—of course—on five to eight year olds. She not only lists and describes books recommended for each year group, she also explains how children's needs and interests develop and change. This indispensable guide mainly covers British and American books.

Michele Landsberg, **THE WORLD OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS**, Simon & Schuster

In what is arguably the best guide available to good children's books, Michele Landsberg does not shrink from defining her rigorous notion of a good book and makes over 400 enthusiastic recommendations, nearly half of them for children up to eight. **The World of Children's Books** is an exhilarating book for thoughtful parents.

Stephen Matthews, **CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF THE CENTURY**, Co-op Bookshop

This guide to books which have won the most important children's literary awards in Australia, the USA and the UK includes brief descriptions of every book as well as helpful indexes and interesting trivia.

Maurice Saxby & Glenys Smith, **FIRST CHOICE**, Oxford University Press

Subtitled "A guide to the best books for Australian children", this volume recommends nearly 1000 books, by no means all of them Australian. Arranged in age-grouped lists for the youngest children up to young adults, this huge book also has useful thematic indexes.

Jim Trelease, **THE READ-ALOUD HANDBOOK** (Australian edition), Penguin

This is a detailed and well-argued case for reading aloud to children, with recommendations of over 300 books especially suitable for parents and children to share. The books recommended in the Australian edition naturally include a generous number of Australian titles.

REFERENCES

Butler, Dorothy (1988) *Babies Need Books*, 2nd edn. London: Penguin.

Landsberg, Michele (1988) *The World of Children's Books*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Saxby, Maurice & Smith, Glenys (1991) *First Choice*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Trelease, Jim (1986) *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. Ringwood: Penguin.